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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR EUR DAS JONES FROM AMBASSADOR BRADTKE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [OTRA](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [HR](#)
SUBJECT: CROATIA: SCENESETTER FOR DAS JONES

¶1. (U) Stu, the Croatia that you will be visiting on September 10 has changed greatly from your desk officer days and even from the time we worked together on NATO issues. Croatia has made steady progress in strengthening its democracy and rule of law, reforming its economy, cooperating with the Hague Tribunal, and playing a more constructive role in the region and beyond. With President Bush's early commitment to support Croatian membership in NATO and his successful visit here in April, our bilateral relations are excellent, but need to be broadened and deepened by expanding our economic relations, increasing exchanges, and making it easier for Croatians and Americans to travel to each others' countries.

REMAINING CHALLENGES

¶2. (U) Although Croatia has made progress, some legacy issues remain from the 1990's "Homeland" War, including refugee returns, war crimes prosecutions, and demining. In all of these areas, however, President Mesic and Prime Minister Sanader are committed to finding solutions. Some 130,000 ethnic Serbs who fled Croatia during the war have returned at least part-time, and Sanader wants to deal with the remaining cases, perhaps 10,000 to 15,000, by the end of 2009. Croatian courts are trying war crimes cases involving defendants of all ethnicities in a reasonably fair manner, including high-profile cases transferred from The Hague Tribunal. However, the trials can vary starkly depending on the court and judge involved, and concerns remain about a large number of outstanding war crimes indictments and in absentia convictions against Serbs that are often poorly documented. On demining, Croatia is perhaps the only severely mine-affected country in the world to self-fund the large majority of its demining process, but with 1000 sq. km. of mine suspected territory still remaining, our assistance, \$2 million annually, is greatly appreciated.

¶3. (U) Another major set of challenges is in reforming the judicial system, and developing more effective responses to and controls against corruption. While the judiciary remains an area for further reforms and the public still perceives it as one of the country's main sources of corruption, we have nevertheless witnessed steady progress. Court backlogs have shrunk 30 percent in the past two years, and improvements in court administration are expected to further speed the process. The Ministry of Justice, with past help from USAID (which closed its mission here earlier this year) and current attention from the EU, is actively improving the training of judges and supervision of judicial administration. Croatia's implementation of its National Strategy to Combat Organized Crime and Corruption is yielding some results, though so far more indictments than actual convictions. The government has, however, established police and prosecutor task forces to combat organized crime and has begun freezing assets in narcotics cases.

SECURITY PROVIDER

14. (SBU) As the legacy of the war fades, and key reforms take root, the focus of our bilateral relationship has shifted to place a much greater emphasis on Croatia as a partner and ally. As you probably heard from Ambassador Grabar-Kitarovic during her introductory call with you, Croatia has moved from being a consumer of international security resources to a provider. Croatia's commitment to international peace and security includes a nearly 300-troop ISAF contingent in Afghanistan; liaison officers involved in Operation Active Endeavor; soldiers and police in 11 UN peacekeeping missions from Kosovo to East Timor; and an active partnership in both the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Adriatic Charter. A major focus of our efforts on our bilateral relationship is on bolstering Croatia's capacity to be a contributor to international security, either militarily, such as in ISAF, or politically, in venues ranging from the UNSC to the IAEA. We do sometimes see nuanced differences of emphasis in the attitudes of the Government led by Prime Minister Sanader and the Office of President Mesic, but both are unquestionably pro-Western in outlook and emphatic in their support for NATO and EU membership. Indeed, these goals are universally shared by every serious political party and politician in the country.

YOUR SCHEDULE: MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER LIKELY TO FOCUS ON NATO AND REGIONAL ISSUES

15. (U) Upon your arrival from Sarajevo, DCM Vivian Walker will greet you to escort you up to my residence, where you will have an opportunity to freshen up and we can spend some time talking one-to-one. At 10 a.m., you will meet with Foreign Minister Gordan Jandrokovic, one of the younger members of the ruling HDZ party's leadership. Discussion will likely center on the current state of the ratification process for Croatia's NATO accession, other bilateral issues, as well as developments in the region. Given events in Georgia, I would expect Russia also to be a topic of conversation.

16. (SBU) As you know, Croatia's top priorities are completing NATO accession and accelerating the EU accession process. The United States has earned significant credit with the GoC by ensuring that the NATO process has moved as quickly as possible, in fairly stark contrast to Croatia's halting progress toward the EU. Public opinion in Croatia remains favorable to NATO with more than fifty percent of the population supporting membership, a number which is in the same range as support for joining the EU. The GOC continues its NATO outreach efforts, and after our meeting, the Foreign Minister is opening a NATO exhibit at a local gallery.

17. (SBU) On regional issues Croatia tries to send good, responsible messages to the Serbs, but since Kosovo recognition, the interaction has grown more strained, and in contrast with EU countries, Serbia has not returned its Ambassador to Zagreb. Serbia remains one of Croatia's largest markets for exports and investment, however, and both President Stjepan Mesic and Prime Minister Sanader firmly support Serbia's future in Europe and NATO, on the condition that Serbia meet its obligations to the ICTY just as Croatia had to. (NOTE: One of the two remaining ICTY fugitives, Goran Hadzic, is a rebel Serb leader accused of crimes in Croatia. END NOTE.) On Bosnia, Zagreb's official policy is solid: they do not support a third entity. PM Sanader is, however, very eager to see something done to protect and guarantee a role for the Bosnian-Croat community in BiH government structures.

18. (SBU) Jandrokovic may raise two specific goals Croatia has previously expressed, inclusion in the Visa Waiver program and the hope that the mandate of the OSCE Office in Croatia terminate at the end of this year. On Visa Waiver, we have acknowledged their interest but tried to keep the Croatian

government focused on the need to meet the necessary pre-conditions such as issuance of ePassports with biometric data, a step that is likely a year or more off. On the OSCE Office, that debate is only likely to be seriously engaged later in the fall. We have been sympathetic to their desire to draw-down this costly presence, but also need to encourage the GoC to consider carefully what damage they might do to their relations with some EU member states if they push too hard without a better story to tell on housing numbers for returnees.

¶9. (SBU) The other area of our bilateral relations, where we are trying to do more, is bilateral trade and investment. As we have discussed, the postponement of the Vienna Conference, has left us with little to show in response to the Prime Minister's request to President Bush for support for closer economic ties. We are working on a visit to the United States by a Croatian trade delegation, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Polancec, but this trip, too, may be postponed, given our election calendar. Your visit may also coincide with some bad news on the economic front. The FAA is likely to find that weaknesses in Croatia's civil aviation authority will make Croatia a "category two" country. Even if this is not a finding about Croatian Airlines, the government and airline management are concerned about the damage that could result to Croatia's crucial tourist industry.

¶10. (U) After your meeting with the Foreign Minister, you will have an opportunity to see our Embassy facilities and meet the country team before we take you to the airport for your flight to Pristina.

¶11. (U) I look forward to seeing you next Wednesday.
Bradtke